

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PROP, SF
SUBJECT: ALLEGATIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION PAYMENTS
TO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS

REFS: CAPE TOWN A-18, JOHANNESBURG 1067

1. A NEW FACET OF THE BURGEONING SCANDALS IN THE SOUTH
AFRICAN DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION (REFAIR) HAS EMERGED WITH
THE REVELATION BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE WEEKEND NEWSPAPERS THAT
DEPARTMENT MAY BE PAYING FOREIGN JOURNALISTS TO WRITE STORIES
FAVORABLE TO SOUTH AFRICA. THE REPORTS WERE BASED ON A
LETTER WRITTEN BY SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION ESCHER RHOODIE TO
THE SOUTH AFRICAN TREASURY ASKING FOR R300,000 (US\$1.15)
FR A SPONSORED ARTICLE PROGRAM TO PROPAGATE THE INDEPENDENCE
OF TRANSKEI. AMONG THE FOUR OPTIONS LISTED BY RHOODIE FOR
EXPENDITURE OF THE FUNDS WAS: "THE BUYING OF THE SERVICES
OF A "JOURNALIST WHO THEN OSTENSIBLY SUPPLIES INDEPENDENT
MATERIAL FOR HIS PUBLICATION WHILE WE PAY HIM FOR HIS FAVOR-
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ABLE OPINION." THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION HAS DENIED
THAT ANY FUNDS WERE ACTUALLY SPENT IN THIS MANNER, ALTHOUGH
ACKNOWLEDGING THAT RHOODIE DID MAKE THE SUGGESTION. SINCE
THE ALLEGATIONS WERE FIRST PUBLISHED BY THE "SUNDAY TIMES"
ON APRIL 16, OTHER ENGLISH PAPERS HAVE CARRIED SENSATIONALIST
STORIES ABOUT HOW THE REVELATIONS HAVE HURT SOUTH AFRICA'S
IMAGE IN THE WORLD PRESS.

2. A "SUNDAY EXPRESS" REPORTER WHO IS INVESTIGATING THE MISUSE OF FUNDS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TOLD US IN CONFIDENCE THAT HIS NEWSPAPER BELIEVES THAT THE "SATURDAY EVENING POST" WAS AMONG THE PUBLICATIONS PAID FOR FAVORABLE ARTICLES ON SOUTH AFRICA. THE "EXPRESS" IS NOW INVESTIGATING AND MAY PUBLISH AN ARTICLE TO THIS EFFECT IN ITS APRIL 30 EDITION.

3. THE ALLEGED "BUYING" OF JOURNALISTS IS PERHAPS THE MOST SENSATIONAL OF A WEB OF SCANDALS NOW EMERGING AROUND THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION. MOST OF THE OTHER REVELATIONS HAVE INVOLVED ALLEGED UNAUTHORIZED EXPENDITURE, MISMANAGEMENT, AND QUESTIONABLE TRAVELS AT PUBLIC EXPENSE BY TOP OFFICIALS, INCLUDING RHODIE. THE REVELATIONS LED TO A SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON APRIL 21 DURING WHICH MINISTER OF INFORMATION CONNIE MULDER WELCOMED AN INVESTIGATION AND SAID "HEADS WOULD ROLL" IF CORRUPTION OR DISHONESTY WAS REVEALED. WITH EACH NEW REVELATION IT APPEARS LESS LIKELY THAT RHODIE, THE DEPARTMENT'S TOP CIVIL SERVANT, WILL SURVIVE THE SCANDALS. MULDER HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE, MAY WELL EMERGE UNSCATHED.

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